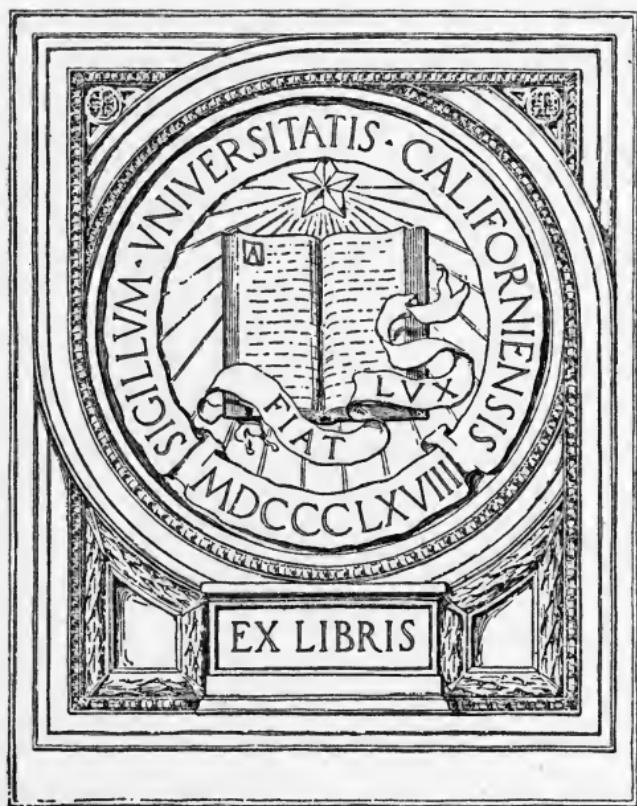


DAY
DREAMS
OF
GREECE

CHARLES
WHARTON
STORK





DAY DREAMS OF GREECE

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DAY DREAMS OF GREECE

BY

CHARLES WHARTON STORK



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“Das Land der Griechen mit der Seele suchend.”

Goethe



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MAIN

TO

MY FATHER

TO WHOM, PRIMARILY

I OWE

AN EARLY AND ABIDING LOVE

OF THE CLASSICS

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To Zeus

Written in the Vale of Tempe

Ah no, thou art not dead. The dimming years
Have cast no shadow on thy tranquil brow,
Although perchance our eyes are blinded now
By swirling dust of sophist doubts and fears.
Yet here to me thy form serene appears
Majestic as of old, when on the prow
Of chafing Argo Jason made his vow
To thee amid the Greeks' resounding cheers.

There stands thy dais with its mantle white,
These plane trees are thy flowing garment's hem,
And thou art here. The creature of a day
Looks and believes. Time's veil before his sight
Sweeps back; he sees thy robe, thy diadem,
And feels that thou hast never passed away.



The Sculptor of Melos

Finished at last for all the world to see,
My statue stands. A statue did I say ?
Nay, rather a goddess fair as Venus' self,
When from her seashell in Cythera's foam
She stepped in virgin freshness. O ye gods,
Receive a sister in your high domain
To share your royal banquet. What long years
I've toiled to coax from out this stubborn block
Its mystery of beauty. Night on night
I spent in sleepless visions, day by day
I plied my chisel, guided by the hand
Of great Apollo, god of all the arts.
Now it is done ; then what remains to do ?

Behold her ! Is she not perfection's self ?
Her forehead smooth with hair in ample folds

THE SCULPTOR OF MELOS

Drawn back above the temples, her pure brow
And profile cleanly cut in classic line ;
Then see the supple neck how softly curved,
Those breasts where Mars might lay his warlike head,
That yielding waist, those round limbs moulded
through

Their clinging robes—Ah, Zeus, but she is fair !
Withal so noble. Would you care to know
How first I saw her ? There was once a maid,
Her name Ione, and her beauty more
Than mortal dared to dream of. She it was,
Who kindled in my eager brain the thought
That I should form this Venus. She it was,
In the first glow of girlish innocence,
Who stood as model for me. I had loved her,
But that my dreams were more to me than life ;
And loving more my art, I told her not,
Lest, grown self-conscious, all her virgin charm
Should vanish in a blush ; and when I feared
That love might touch her heart too soon, I spoke
Of our great purpose till her languid eyes
Would light to think that she should be immortal,
And she would never sigh for earthly love.

THE SCULPTOR OF MELOS

So we lived on till yesterday, for then
I struck the last stroke, and the statue stood
Even as you see it now. But when I turned
To fold the girl in my victorious arms,
My heart misgave me. For she was so pure
With newly ripened beauty, that it seemed
As if she too deserved to win the gift
Of everlasting youth, just as the statue.
That moment's loveliness could never last
Above a month or two, and then would come
The withering summer days of dust and heat,
Marring those perfect lines. How could I keep
her

Forever young and fair? At last I spoke.
“Ione, now you stoop a thought too far.
See! I must set you right.” And where her heart
Was beating proud and guileless, there I drove
My dagger—and she sank into my arms.
Ah! then I kissed her wildly, pressed her close
My own Ione, mine forevermore!
And both forever deathless, for above
The statue gazed upon us, and I knew
That Venus could not perish, and our souls

THE SCULPTOR OF MELOS

Were both transfused throughout the marble there.
And for myself—this life, what matters it ?
It may be I shall hie me to the wars,
Or take the lover's leap. Why should I care ?
When death begins my immortality.

Ganymede

I wonder why it seems so long ago
Since I was with my sheep on Ida's slope
That fateful day. Where was I when I saw
The eagle? I remember clearer now.
'Twas on a languid summer afternoon,
I lay beneath a cedar by a stream,
And watched the westering sunlight glinting through
The misty foliage. My sheep grazed near,
And I was leaning back with eyes half-closed
When, like a gold-rimmed mote against the blue,
I saw the bird of Jove. Idly at first
I followed as he fell, and grew, and spread,
Winging his lonely and portentous way
With mighty sweep and long, majestic poise,
Till straight above my flock he stayed his flight.

GANYMEDE

Like some dark pirate from the Lesbian shore,
Marring the Hellespont with sable sail
And menacing a white-walled fishing town,
Defenceless ; so above his helpless prey
The eagle hung, then sudden, sheer as fate,
Dropped. But by this I started to my feet
And ran all weaponless to save my lambs.
The bird had pounced on one, my youngest ; I,
Desperate, thoughtless, leaped upon his back.
When, strange to tell, I felt his body grow
Beneath me, and he rose into the air.
I dug my fingers deep into the down
And clung as to a crumbling cliff, while up
And ever up we mounted. First, my eyes
Were blind with flapping wings ; but as we rose,
The beats came seldom, for one strong waft
Sufficed to send us far upon our way.
Then I looked down. Already my poor sheep,
Scattered in terror at their master's fate,
Were specks diminishing against the green.
A slow, relentless sweep of buoyant wings,—
And when I looked again I saw proud Troy,
Her thread-fine streets most like a spider's web

GANYMEDE

Which centred in the thronging market-place.
Beyond to westward swam the purple sea,
Dotted with silver sails and rocky isles.
On o'er the strait we held our steady course
Toward barren Thrace and rugged Macedon
Where, I had heard men say, Olympus raised
His hoary citadel, the home of Jove.
But now the coast was curtained by a mass
Of storm-piled cloud that swung above the sea ;
While lashing gusts, like bending charioteers,
Urged on ten thousand tossing-crested steeds
Shaking the salt foam from their bitted lips.
Sudden the wind blew dinning round my ears
And flung my hair across my fear-moist brow.
Deep plumage warmed my breast, but round my
back
The cold air eddied like a snow-chilled spring.
The glaring light grew faint. Great ragged shapes
Had flaunted o'er the sky and dimmed the sun,
While from their depths the distant thunder spoke.
Came a wild rush of tempest-loosened air,
And now the plashy rain-drops stung my back
Harder and faster in a sluicing stream.

GANYMEDE

Then lightning quivered like a brandished spear
Full at my shrinking eyes. I held my breath
Till with a crash the thunder smote my ears
And rolled away in distant resonance.
But on as through the jaws of Tartarus
The eagle bore me through the storm, now black,
Now blazing. Then I closed my eyes and prayed
To Pan, the shepherd's god, to bring me back
To Ida's slope to shield my helpless lambs
Unshepherded beneath the savage gale.
So as I prayed, meseemed I lay once more
On Ida's smiling slope amid the thyme
And bright anemones, purple and scarlet,
With all around my frisking lambs at play,—
When a harsh roar as of a splitting crag
Awoke me, and I sank down limp with fright
To know I still was on the eagle's back
In the storm's heart, but nigh had slipped my hold
While vainly dreaming. Yet, great Pan be
thanked!
That awful clap of thunder was the last.
Quickly the tempest fled, the light streamed down
Upon me, till through wisps of thinning cloud

GANYMEDE

The great sun glowed, and I looked out at him.
Now from his bronze-gilt wings the eagle shook
Bright pearly drops that sparkled rainbow hues,
While I tossed back my dripping locks to bathe
My face in light I had not hoped to see.
Over my shoulder flew the last torn shred
Of cloud, and all the sky and air was clear.
Below were Thracian herdsmen driving home
Their pygmy creeping flocks through freshened
fields

Towards cottages whence curling smoke arose.
Bare hills stood gold-crowned in the mellow light,
Until upon a far-off rim of black
The red, slow sun melted away and sank.
Stillness came o'er me then with such relief
That, clasping tense arms round the eagle's neck,
I sank my head and let my senses swim
Oblivious.

I wakened in this wide Olympus hall,
Where as my nightly task I bear the bowl
Of nectar to the gods, their kingly slave.
But when the glitter of the feast grows pale

GANYMEDE

And the great guests have parted one by one,
I come and stand here on the mountain's brink
And gaze away toward my own native shore,
Wondering who tends my sheep on Ida's slope
Now I am gone, and if they miss me there.

The Wanderings of Psyche

" Oh latest-born and loveliest vision far
Of all Olympus' faded hierarchy ! "

KEATS

To R. C.

I

PSYCHE

FAR in the blue perspective of lost years
When Greece was young and the immortal gods
Still walked with men, there lived a mighty king,
The father of three daughters. Two were fair,
As human fairness goes, but ah ! the third
Seemed not of earth, but like a sylph composed
All of the nobler elements; some flower,
Pure as the air and golden as the sun,
To catch the joy of springtide in its cup.
She moved as lightly as a summer cloud
That floats on high in white tranquility.

THE WANDERINGS OF PSYCHE

Her name was Psyche, and she scarce had reached
Her maiden blossom-time when all the shrines
Of Venus were neglected, for the folk
Thronged to the palace for a glimpse of her,
Saying, "This goddess we are bid to serve,
We have not seen nor yet are like to see.
'Tis better we should worship what we know."
From cold, deserted shrines the priests sent up
Their prayers to slighted Venus, till she frowned,
And summoning her purple-wingèd son,
She thus addressed him, " See'st thou, heedless boy,
How thy once honoured mother now is scorned
All for a mortal girl ? Thou carest not.
Nay, if thou dost, revenge her. In my court,
As well thou knowest, two bright fountains play
Of sorrow one to lovers, one of joy.
Fill thou these flasks, fly to the maid, make sure
That she no more shall prank her insolence
In colours won from me." Cupid obeyed.
Entering the court, he watched the silver founts
Spout forth their glittering, fateful drops that
plashed
Into one marble basin for a type

THE WANDERINGS OF PSYCHE

Of mingled joy and bitterness in love—
Then filled his bubbling flasks and flew away.

Swiftly did Cupid wing the radiant air,
Until as Phœbus' chariot neared the sea,
A light wind bore her to the rose-wreathed bower
Where Psyche slept. The westering sunlight stole
On tip-toe in to touch her parted lips,
And dwell in breathless rapture with a soft
Caress upon the tangled skein of gold
That crowned her queenly brow. Then Cupid came
As noiseless as the sunlight and as rapt.
Revenge, unfed by anger, smouldered low ;
And he who came to punish, stayed to gaze.
A shadow of her future passing o'er
Psyche's unconscious eyes half frightened off
The slumber weighing softly on the lids.
She stirred a blue-veined hand, while Cupid gazed
Tremorous with hope and fear,—but she awoke not.
Her cheek, part pillowed on her bended arm,
Was smooth as alabaster and as cool.
The slight warm-tinted throat lay bare, her robe
Rose lightly with her breath and lightly fell.
Long Cupid looked and sighed unconsciously ;

THE WANDERINGS OF PSYCHE

But love is half caprice. Just then his eyes,
Sinking bedazzled, fell upon the flask
Of his stored vengeance. This, then, was the
beauty

That shamed his mother. Ere a second thought
He poured the baneful stream on Psyche's lips.

With stifling sobs she struggled from her sleep,
Her violet eyes o'erbrimmed with trembling tears.
He, all amazement at the sudden change
Wrought by his deed, let slip the barbèd dart
He just had drawn to fix a restless love
In Psyche's bosom ; and the treacherous point,
Turning against the archer, smote him deep.
How deep he knew not then, but full of pity
And soft remorse, he took the flask of joy
And bathed the maiden's face with balmy drops.
Then, in sweet terror of he knew not what,
He fled her glance which pierced him through
unseen.

THE WANDERINGS OF PSYCHE

II

PSYCHE'S MARRIAGE

As fluttering petals from the apple-bough
Detached by listless summer's languid hand,
So Psyche's girlhood pleasures at the touch
Of feverish longing, vague and undefined,
Fell off and floated from her. Now no more
She mingled with her maidens in the dance
Where once her slender form swayed gracefulest.
She fled the ball-play and the festal songs
To muse in solitude. Her elder sisters
Were wooed and wedded both ; but Psyche still,
Worshipped by all but never loved by one,
Charmed with her lute the silence of her bower.
At length the good king, anxious for his last
And best-beloved, sent to Delphi's shrine
Wherein Apollo's voice oracular
Darkly foretells the doubtful fate of men.
Thus spoke the Pythoness, " On such a day
Prepare the feast, for Psyche then must wed

THE WANDERINGS OF PSYCHE

That creature dreaded most by all the gods ;
Before whose might grim Pluto's self has bowed,
And wrathful Neptune, shaker of the earth,—
Nay, even Jove admits his sovereignty.
Perform the sacred rites and send her forth
To meet her husband on Mount Eremos.”
With deepest grief the old king read the scroll
He could not but obey ; and at the time
Appointed, all the festal rites fulfilled,
Her handmaids led their white-veiled mistress
forth
With mournful marriage hymn. No flowers were
strewn,
No torches burned, but on the fatal mount
The pale bride, cowering like a frightened dove
Beneath the falcon menace of her fate,
Raised up her tear-sad face to kiss her sire,
While he, embracing her in silence, turned
Away his eyes from the ill-omened sight.
The long procession solemnly withdrew,
And Psyche sank down prostrate to the ground.
 The sunset sent no ray of hope to her,
 The wan stars looked down coldly on her grief,

THE WANDERINGS OF PSYCHE

Till at the last, outworned with suspense,
She raised her body from the cruel earth
And prayed for pity to the western breeze !

“ O Zephyr, gray-winged Zephyr, wind of even,
That bearest dew to all the drooping flowers,
And quiet to the birds and folded flocks,
That waftest sleep across the weary eyes
Of men and lullest every care to rest,—
Have mercy, too, on me and comfort me.
Stoop down and bear me from this hateful spot,
Although thou dash me on the rocks below.”

And Zephyr, hearing, gently took her up,
Soothing her anguish with his tender touch,
And bore her from the mount, she knew not
where.

THE WANDERINGS OF PSYCHE

III

THE BRIDEGROOM

With the first saffron glow, ere yet the dawn
Or consciousness burst flooding on her mind,
While dreams of girlish days in flowery fields
Still drifted through her slumber, Psyche thought
To wake and find herself as heretofore
Safe in her little bed whence oft the sun,
Her playfellow, had roused her, peeping in
Beneath her eyelashes as if to say,
“Come, little sister. See ! I wait for you.”
But no, the room wherein she found herself
Was large and dim, with gold-wrought arras hung,
The wood-work richly carved, the whole more
grand
Than any chamber of her father’s house.
Half awed, half frightened by such stateliness,
She rose, and putting on her wedding robes,
Fled out into the daylight. There the sun
Greeted her gladly as of old and made

THE WANDERINGS OF PSYCHE

Familiar even the strange walks and groves
'Mid which she found herself. Above her arched
Great fountain-strays of palm that seemed to bow
Like giant servitors along her path.
Beyond, an ordered grove of orange trees,
Their dark green branches hung with golden fruit,
Was spread. And there were meadows flecked
with flowers ;
The pink-veined white of slender asphodels,
Languid Narcissi by the waterside,
And wind-flowers, crimson dots against the grass.
Nor was the garden silent. From the trees,—
Where in the dimness flitted gorgeous birds,
Blue, red and orange as from tropic climes,—
A stream of intermittent melody
Poured rippling down, each bird with rill-like
notes
Swelling the flood of song, while from the fields
The tremulous chirping of the cicada
Shrilled like the audible quivering of the heat.
A sandy glade o'ergrown with lowly thyme
Was vocal with the grumbling of the bees.
The livelong day did Psyche wander there,

THE WANDERINGS OF PSYCHE

Tasting the fruit or listening to the birds,
Or resting in the shadow of the palms
To quaff the fragrant air deliciously,
Forgetful of her grief; until at last,
Wearied and lonely, as the dusk drew down
Across the shining sky, she turned about
And sought the palace. In the festal hall
A hundred torches burned and in the midst
Was spread a sumptuous banquet, but—most
strange!—

No human face had Psyche yet beheld.
Her heart was timid, but in all these scenes
Of varied loveliness a guardian hand
Seemed still to guide and soothe her lightest
fears.

Reclining at the feast, she heard from far
Sweet voices mingling with the dove-toned lyre.
Nearer the music drew till she could hear
The words by those aerial minstrels sung,
Of ancient kings, of love and warlike deeds.
Touched by the plaintive sorrow of the songs,
Psyche lay wondering till night closed down
And it was time to seek her bridal bed.

THE WANDERINGS OF PSYCHE

Through the low casement full-orbed Dian
glowed;

To her the maiden prayed, "O Virgin pure,
Sailing serenely on through straits of cloud,
Hear and protect thy helpless votaress
From all the fears of darkness and of doubt.
Beam from thy sovereign height ethereal
And shed a benediction on my couch.

Ah, guard me."—Here a floating shadow veiled
The casement's light, faint rustling stirred the air.
A scent more sweet than winds o'er southern seas
Was wafted in. All trembling Psyche stood
With lips apart, the quick breath quivering through,
Half faint with terror, yet not all afraid.

The form bent down, two warm, soft arms stretched
out

And took her gently; then a tender mouth
Was pressed to hers, she felt the dim star-shine
Of two great eyes, lovingly luminous.
Her lord had come to claim her for his wife.

THE WANDERINGS OF PSYCHE

IV

CUPID

Psyche awoke to find that it was day,
And all her formless cloudy memories
Were as a dream of folding arms and kisses
That melted in the light ; but yet her heart
Grew passionate in denial, for she knew
By all the wisdom of her new-born self
The wondrous dream was true. So passed the
hours

In hope and hushed expectancy of night.
Again her unseen husband came to her,
And Psyche sank into his yielding arms.
So followed countless days and countless nights.

Ah, restless race of mortals, ever prone
To seek the cause of happiness and not
To thank the gods for happiness itself !
Who then, of womankind had been more blest
Than Psyche had she trusted in her fate ?

THE WANDERINGS OF PSYCHE

A feverish, inquisitive discontent
Impelled her to transgress her lord's command
And seek to see his face. That very night
Gravely and tenderly he spoke to her :
“ Psyche, my sweetest, art thou not at peace ?
Is not my love enough for thee, do not
Obedient hands fulfil they every wish ?
Why this distrust ? ” And Psyche was ashamed.
Then he continued, “ Know, my gentle bride,
Thou may'st not look upon my face as yet.
See thou attempt it not, else ruin dire
Will straightway fall on us and blight our love.
But tell me, hast though any other wish ?
’Tis granted with the asking.” She replied
And said, “ I pray thee let my sisters come
And visit me. ’Tis lonely all day long
While thou are absent.”

“ This I feared,” he sighed,
“ And would I might dissuade thee from thy will.”
But Psyche’s heart was stubborn and she said,
“ I wish it,” till he answered, “ Be it so.”

On the next day her sisters came to her.
They feigned to marvel much, but envy stirred

THE WANDERINGS OF PSYCHE

Their shallow hearts till the black hate rose up.
Swift is the sympathy of evil minds,
As from an ugly cloud the lightning-flash
Darts to the next. The snare was quickly laid.
“ Come hither Psyche, child, and tell us of
The princely bridegroom.” Guileless, she replied,
“ I never see him, for he comes at night,
And ere the eager fingers of the dawn
Uncertain day, he kisses me farewell.”
“ What,” cried the sister, “ can it really be
That you have never seen him ? Fine, forsooth !
A pretty marriage ! Know you not the doom
That you should wed some monster feared by all
The gods ? And now be sure he fattens you
To make the better feast, or keeps you slave
To his vile lust. But we’ll frustrate him yet.
Prepare a lamp to-night to place beneath
Your pillow ere he comes, then whet a knife
To the keenest. Nerve your spirit for the deed,
And when he sleeps, steal slyly from his arms,
Light your lamp, strike, sever your loathsome
bonds.”
They parted, but the words in Psyche’s heart

THE WANDERINGS OF PSYCHE

Rankled and poisoned it with dire mistrust.
Who was her lord, and why this secrecy
With her he feigned to love? Too soon forgot
The gentle words of warning tenderness.
Unceasing rang the jangling oracle:
“ That creature dreaded most by all the gods.”
She trimmed her lamp and made the dagger keen.
That night he did not speak to her or kiss her
As he was wont to do, but turned away
And after a little slept. She listened close
To hear his breath soft-drawn and regular.
Almost she had relented but—almost.
Hardened by her bad purpose, she drew forth
The lamp and knife, stifling her struggling gasps.
Quickly she struck the flint and stood prepared
To kill.

At first the sudden flame flared up,
Dazzling her deadly purpose; then she saw,—
Head upon arm the fairest of the gods
And youngest. Ivory was that arm, the cheek
It pillow'd rosy as a sunset cloud.
Loose o'er the brow ambrosial ringlets strayed,
Fluttering with the breeze how trustfully!

THE WANDERINGS OF PSYCHE

Behind his head the folded wings shone white
As those of Venus' doves. While Psyche leaned,
The sleeper stirred, and she in shrinking back
Let fall a burning drop of oil upon
His smooth, bare shoulder.

Waking in pain, he sent one sorrowing look
To Psyche's soul, then spread his gleaming wings
And bird-like slipped from her detaining arms.
Reeling to the window, helpless, desperate,
She saw him rise and vanish in the night.

THE WANDERINGS OF PSYCHE

V

THE QUEST

Dull throbbed the pain in Psyche's breast. Before
Her eyes unclosed, while yet her mind was dark,
She felt the leaden weight of dull despair.
Gone was the palace, vanished was the grove
And she was lying prostrate in the dust,
Alone once more upon the lonely mount.
Yet, like the bright-winged hope Pandora found
Within the box whence all her troubles came,
This secret joy whispered in Psyche's breast :
Her husband was a god and he had loved her.
Loved her,—at last she understood, she drank
The bitter drops of Venus' bitter fountain.
Then purpose, like a god, inspired each nerve
With sudden strength. She raised herself, then
shook
Her dusty robe and smoothed it decently,
For she was now resolved to seek the shrine
Of Venus, there to kneel and own her fault,
Not knowing Venus was her enemy.

THE WANDERINGS OF PSYCHE

That day she started forth upon her quest
O'er the rough hills and sunny dales of Greece.
At dawn the dew-drenched hunter saw her pass,
At sultry noon she paused to quench her thirst
Among the reapers sprawled amid the stubble,
And timidly at even she would seek
A friendly shelter from the chill of night,
At day-break forth again upon the quest.
All helped, all pitied in that kindly age
Of peasant hospitality, but no one
Could ease her of her load of self-reproach.
Along the yellow highway deep with dust
Her journey lay, then through the bustling streets
Of market towns she went as one apart,
Or, passing o'er a bridge of rough-hewn stone,
She paused to watch the waters gallop by ;
Breasted a steep ascent and from the crest
Beheld the valley with her empty eyes.
At length within a dell at eventide
She found the long-sought shrine, the altar cold
And all the pillars draped with dreary shadows.
She crouched before the ashes, and her prayer
Rose gallant through the gloom, till suddenly

THE WANDERINGS OF PSYCHE

In awful, deep-flushed anger Venus stood
Before her suppliant and with scornful words
Addressed her, " So, proud girl, you come at last
For tidings of your husband, sadly scorched
By his dear wife's caresses. In good time!
Here's work enough for idle housewife's hands."
With that she led her to a granary
Where heaps of grain lay mixed ; wheat, millet,
 rye,
Barley and spelt, a thousand thousand seeds.
" Sort out these grains, each several kind apart,
And have your task performed at my return."
So she was gone, but Psyche sank inert
And did not move a finger to the task.
While thus she lay, past hope, a tiny voice
Chirped at her very ear, " Sleep, sleep and fear
 not.
I and my brothers here will do the task."
She looked and saw a countless host of ants
Running and tugging at the heaps of grain,
And sorting out each kind in even piles.
Then Psyche, having thanked the unknown power
That aided her, fell fast asleep. Next morn,

THE WANDERINGS OF PSYCHE

When Venus came and found the labour done,
She scowled and all her lovely face grew dark.
“ This is no thrift of yours, oh graceless one.
But come! another task. You see yon field
Where gold-fleeced rams are feeding. Hasten
forth

And gather of the wool from every fleece.”

Unwitting of the danger, Psyche went
Straight toward the field, but as she passed a stream
She heard how in the rustling water-reeds
A river god gave warning : “ Stay, rash girl,
Nor court a certain death. At prime of day
The rams wax fell, but with the noon-tide heat
Their rage abates. Thou then mayst venture
forth

And gather from the thorns their shining fleece.”

The frightened girl obeyed, and when the sun
Stood highest, went again and filled her arms
With crisp and glittering wool. That night secure
She rested, and at dawn the goddess came.
“ The task is done though by no wit of yours,
And now this last command I lay upon you.
Descend to Pluto’s realm, salute from me

THE WANDERINGS OF PSYCHE

Proserpina and ask of her a box
Filled with her magic beauty, for my own
Is growing pale with watching o'er my son
Who even now lies sick. Depart at once.”
With sinking heart and failing feet the girl
Turned from her angry mistress, knowing not
Which way her steps might lead, and only sure
That now at last all hope was gone. For how
Living could she approach the throne of Dis ;
Or dying, how return to upper air ?
“ It is my death, my death that Venus wishes,”
She wailed, and stumbling up a rocky path,
Paused breathless on the black cliff’s jutting brink
Where, leaning o'er the sheer precipitance,
She wildly prayed, “ O everlasting Jove,
By him thou fearest, by the nameless god
Whose wings are beauty and whose lips are fire,
In whom is all my joy and all my woe,—
Watch over me and save me from my fate.”
And as she would have leaped, a burst of thunder
Appalled her, and from out the cloudless blue
A tawny eagle swept and flew to her.
“ O ever-doubting, headlong-minded one,

THE WANDERINGS OF PSYCHE

Attend Jove's answer. Know in yonder vale
A gloomy cavern yawns. Go boldly in.
'Twill lead you even to the river Styx
Where sallow Charon plies from shore to shore
Across the loathsome stream. Say thou to him,
'I bid thee bear me over in his name
Whom Pluto fears.' Beyond him thou shalt meet
With Cerberus. His mouths thou must appease
With these six cakes, three going three returning.
Enter the palace, speak to Proserpine
As Venus bade, receive the box of beauty
And as thou cam'st, return. But on thy way
Speak not unto the shades nor answer them,
Help none to enter into Charon's boat,
Touch thou no food and see thou open not
The box which Proserpine will give to thee."

THE WANDERINGS OF PSYCHE

VI

THE FINAL TASK

Nerved to fearful journey, Psyche stepped
From out the world of sunlight and of air
Into the land of shadow, following down
The path by which no living thing returns,
Which darkened as she went until it seemed
To lead her straight into the heart of night.
From that time forth the terrors of the way
Were as a dream that seethes with nameless
shapes.

The spirits of the dead trooped by, pale blurs
That stared from out the windows of the dark ;
Gigantic beasts and titans loomed above,
More awful than the blackness. By the shore
Of Styx a gibbering concourse swayed and
thronged
Round Charon's boat, but Psyche, resolute,
Passed on and pushed the yielding shades aside
As one who wades in haste through waving wheat.

THE WANDERINGS OF PSYCHE

She spoke the words, and Charon, beating back
The rest, steered out into the stream. When lo !
From out the pitchy tide a head and arm
Was lifted and a piteous voice implored
A rescuing hand, but Psyche listened not.
Along the farther bank the ghosts were ranged
Like flocks of seamews, gray against the black
Of some long basalt crag that lifts its crest
Above the fleecy breakers. And as gulls
Swoop down when sailors bear the shining fish
To shore, so all the spirits flitted down
To Psyche, asking her of life on earth,
Of husband, wife or brother, but she went
In silence through their midst. At length she
came
Where Cerberus lay stretched, his three red tongues
Lolling like flames. Then Psyche threw her cakes,
And straight the monster bent his triple head,
Devoured the bait and closed his savage eyes.
Before the iron gates of Pluto's house
She first stayed step and knocked, the doors rolled
back,
And Psyche saw the vasty hall of Dis

THE WANDERINGS OF PSYCHE

Unfold. But love that never yet had failed her
Still urged her on through all the murky gods
Straight to the throne of Proserpine. The goddess,
Her fair head weighted with an iron crown,
Stooped down and kissed the girl, so like herself
When mid the flowers she played in Enna's fields.
Psyche made known her wish and Proserpine
Departed to fulfil it. Now the girl
Had leisure to behold the mighty hall,
A boundless dusk set off with pinnacles
Of glowing gems set deep in crusted gold.
On lesser thrones were kings, but raised aloft
In gloom-enshrouded grandeur, with a face
Noble yet pale as death against the dark
Of his long hair, grim Pluto sat. Beneath
Men bustled to and fro, and torches flared ;
But not a muscle moved in that stern cheek.
While Psyche stood in awe, a servant touched
Her arm and pointed to a sumptuous feast :
The costliest meats, cool fruit more tempting ripe
Than ever mocked the lips of Tantalus ;
Yet Psyche put it by. At length the box
Was brought, and she departed as she came.

THE WANDERINGS OF PSYCHE

Through all the terrors of the homeward way
Psyche returned, unnoticed, her heart
Filled full with warm delight that spread and
pulsed

Like joyous wine. Past dog and stream and shades
She won, till dimly through the stifling dark
The faint light glimmered. Then, as by the coast
Of Tyre the unbreathing diver with his load
Of shells whose tint shall dye the robe of kings,
Returning from the depths, beholds once more
With straining eye the emerald glow of day
Above him, so did Psyche's heart with glad
Relief o'erflow, and running toward the gleam,
She burst into the godlike, golden air
As careless as a child runs forth to play.

The task was finished, what remained to do
But bear to Venus' shrine the precious box?
The box! Despite the deeper beauty lent
By love and suffering to her sylph-like face,
Psyche was still in heart the girl who erst,
Fain of her father's praise, would stand before
The mirror, binding up the wealth of hair
That flooded through her fingers; so that now,—

THE WANDERINGS OF PSYCHE

Her sorrows ended,—gay and light of mood,
Her little vanities smiled out. She only thought
How fairest she might greet the eyes of him
She worshipped. Ah the box, the fatal box !
Why could not Venus spare a tinge of all
That beauty brought so faithfully ! She raised
The cover—and a hateful, Stygean sleep
Slunk out and fastened on her reptile-like,
Stifling her laughter with his sluggish breath,
And like a dead thing Psyche fell and lay.

Long hours she lay, and might have lain till
death ;
But Cupid, prisoned in his mother's house
Was troubled with forebodings till by chance,
Seeking escape, he found the tiniest clink
Through which he slipped, and speeding to the
earth,
Sought out his fainting mistress. Brushing off
The ugly sleep, he clasped his wakened bride
Once more, and flying smoothly through the air,
Bore her to high Olympus. There before
The throne of Jove the lover who was love
Pleaded till Jove, raising his dread right hand,

THE WANDERINGS OF PSYCHE

Bade bring the wine of immortality.
So Hebe brought the cup and Psyche drank.
Then while the lovers in each other's eyes
Found full delight, the voice of Jove proclaimed :
“ So dwell ye evermore, and from your love
Shall Pleasure's self be born, your eldest child.”

Philemon and Baucis

When the warm sunbeams slanted from the west,
And o'er the barren peaks and hillsides lay
A glowing robe of purple, doubly rich
With shadow and with mist,—then round the well
The village grandsires gathered, where at ease
They chose their favourite benches in the shade
Of the great piebald plane-trees with their leaves
Wagging in slow content, while near at hand
The dusty children tired of their play
Clustered around to listen. To the well
Some patient housewife now and then would
trudge
And fill her pitcher for the evening meal ;
Perhaps indeed a maiden, dusky, tall,
Bare-footed and bare-armed with splendid neck

PHILEMON AND BAUCIS

On which she poised the jar. Then she would
lean,

Take down and watch it fill, her deep-drawn
breath

Scarce quickening in its steady rise and fall
That swelled her trim-set bodice, when she raised
The ample vessel brimmed with gurgling store.
But if a youth wrapped in his sheep-skin cloak
Should come too early from the fold, her hand,
So sure just now, might tremble, and her breath
Come quick and struggling when he took the jar
And would have saved her labour. Then would
smile

An old, worn patriarch with grizzled head
Yet kindly glance, and chuckle forth, "Aye, Aye!
Ye'll recollect we all were youngsters once."
Whereat the little boys would squirm and turn
Because they did not know, and one would beg,
Caressing with his arm a great gnarled knee
And looking up into the old man's face,
"The story, grandpa, that you told us once
Of mighty gods that came and rested here
At the small cottage down beside the stream."

PHILEMON AND BAUCIS

Now would the group be still, for round these
days

Of shepherd life in rough Arcadia
The golden classic halo lingered yet.

Bacchus and Ceres still were worshipped then,
And Pan, too, piping in his woodland haunts.

So all was quiet save a baying dog,
Gathering in the stragglers to the fold,
And two late-twittering birds. The weary sun
Had rolled his chariot down the crystal bridge
Of day, till the last fading shafts of pink
Played on the snow of Kelmon's glittering crest.

The old man mused a space, then glanced about
him

And with half sigh thus took up the tale :

" Know then, my children, 'twas on such an eve
As this, perhaps a hundred years ago,
That two gray figures crossed the eastern ridge
From which the roadway leads across the dell
Up to the village, as it does to-day.

Ye will not think 'twas long before the dogs
Spied and were after them, but on they came,

PHILEMON AND BAUCIS

Not noticing or caring much it seemed.
Two men they were in meagre peasant dress,
And dusty from the road. The foremost was
The elder and the taller; straight he strode
With flowing hair and beard, and in his face
(As they that tell it say) a dignity
And look as of a king from a far land.
He gazed not on the pathway or the dogs
That shrank without his glance, but stared ahead
Full as an eagle at the sinking sun.
The younger man walked quick with shorter
steps,
Turning at whiles upon the snarling dogs
With a light staff, but when he struck, the pack
Would start as from a snake and one would limp,
Howling as he were bitten to the bone.
Next came the children running down the hill,
A rougher crew than any dogs. They dug
Loose stone from out the torrent bed to fling
At the poor strangers, thinking no doubt because
The men were weaponless and scantily clad
That they would make fair sport. One graceless
scamp

PHILEMON AND BAUCIS

(Mark this, Lycorides) let fly at them
But missed, and ere a second stone was loosed,
Who should dash down upon the startled boys
But old Philemon? His was then the cottage
Beside the stream, where from the vine-wreathed
door

The good man had beheld the shameful sight
Of men baited like wolves, and all the rites
Of sacred, Zeus-taught hospitality
Abused. Then like a seasoned log of oak,
His time-tried heart burst out into a blaze,
And spite his eighty years, he caught his staff,
Scattered the cowardly boys and gave his hand,
Still trembling with his passion, to the first
Of the two pilgrims. ‘Pardon, sir,’ he cried,
‘For these rough curs and rougher cubs of
men.

We live too much like beasts, sir, in these days;
We eat and drink and quarrel o'er our food,
The stronger robs the weaker. All's forgot
Now of those times when gods were not ashamed
To come and share our simple joys with us.
But how I wander! Come, and you, sir, too.

PHILEMON AND BAUCIS

My house is yours, and never did I wish
More deeply 'twere a better one. But come,
Baucis and I will do our best for you.'

The other took Philemon's hand in his
With grasp as steady as the helmsman's grip
That confident through calm and tempest steers.
Deep-voiced and mellow came his measured tones
As echoes in a cave, or April thunder
That bodes no lightning-stroke but rather rain,
Kindly, refreshing and a boon to man :
' Good sir, we make us bold then to intrude
One night upon your hospitality.'

Philemon led them up, solicitous,
To where e'en now the supper was preparing,
And on the rough board table Baucis laid
The oaken dishes. ' See, wife, here be strangers
Whom Zeus hath sent to lodge with us. Set on
The two bronze dishes brought of old from Troy,
Bring the fresh goat's-milk cheese, while I go
down

To pick a clustering bunch of purple grapes
That ripens by the southern wall. Make haste!
No doubt our guests are hungry.' She looked up,

PHILEMON AND BAUCIS

Espied the travellers and bent her head
As who should say, ‘ Ye’re kindly welcome, both.’
Then off she bustled, and in little time
The board was spread with all the scanty best
The worthy pair could boast of. They sat down
Around the table, but the younger guest
First laid his staff aside. Philemon saw
That round its stem were coiled two serpents
wrought
With exquisite workmanship, and as he watched,
They seemed to him to move along the staff,
Gliding and slowly coiling in and out.
He rubbed his eyes,—the light was growing dim,—
No doubt a younger pair of eyes than his
Might be at fault. Meanwhile the meal went on
With many an honest, blunt apology
For the rude fare, but both the strangers ate
With heartiness that made their thanks ring true.
Especially the younger, whose lithe form
Was moulded all of grace, would stop to praise
The goodwife’s cheese, and ask her how it was
She pressed and made it set without a flaw.
Baucis was pleased and fluttered, hardly still

PHILEMON AND BAUCIS

A breathing space for waiting on her guests.
Sure there was something strange about the meal.
The very barley-bread seemed white and fine,
The grapes not bitter as Philemon feared,
But rich and luscious as with nectar juice.
Strangest of all, the little jug of milk
Was inexhaustible. Draught upon draught
The old man poured, but when the young guest
cried,
'Another cup, pray, of your milk. Your goats
Crop only asphodel,' Philemon reached
And, sure the jug contained not ten good drops,
Tilted it upside down. When (can he trust
His eyes?) the warm milk overflowed the cup
And trickled o'er the table. 'Come, good host,'
Said the young stranger, while his twinkling eyes
Brimmed over (like his cup) with merriment,
'You're generous to a fault. See, I must take
The pitcher and pour out the precious milk.'
Forthwith he poured and filled the cups for all.
Then Baucis and Philemon stared and stared
And blessed themselves, looking the while askance
At their two visitors, who heeded not

PHILEMON AND BAUCIS

But ate and drank as calm as common men.
At length the elder, who had used few words
Thus far, looked up and, gazing toward his
host,—

‘And do you dwell here all alone?’ he asked,
‘Ah, sir,’ Philemon said, ‘we had a son,
A good boy, too. He went to the great wars—
No doubt you will have heard. Well, many
went,

And after ten years some of them came back
With spoil and wondrous stories of their deeds.
I ne’er knew rightly what ’twas all about,
Except that my boy said some Troyan lord
Had done our Spartan king great wrong, and
he—

My boy I mean—said every Greek must go
To take in blood swift vengeance for the deed.
Brave lads, brave lads; indeed my son meant
well.

But that was thirty years since. Even then
I was well on in years, sir, as they say;
And Baucis would have been alone. No doubt
Our men fought bravely and the Troyans, too,

PHILEMON AND BAUCIS

If one may judge ; but why they fought at all
Was never clear to me. Well, we lived on
And waited, and the time went slowly by.
We had no battles here except with wolves,
And no one harmed his neighbour. Then,—
 where was I ?—

Ah yes. We waited till the rest came back.
Pan ! what a day was that—so few, so few.
They said our boy had died upon the field
And won great glory. All that we could see
Was that the bed we'd strewn ten years for him
Would now be always empty, and our prayers
That day and night had gone up to the gods
Need now be made for him no more. You see
I'd toiled and sweated odd of forty year,
Had made my farm and saved a bit beside ;
And then I looked that he would come and keep
 me,
And bring his wife home, too, and I should have
A grandson at my knees to take the name
And live contented here as I have done.
Ah well, there's many a sorrow in the world,
But all is for the best. So we lived on.

PHILEMON AND BAUCIS

The times grew harder soon, my friends were
dead,

The younger folk, too, were not always kind ;
But thanks to my good wife, we still keep up
And shall do till the end. And when it comes,
Be it to both at once ; that's all my prayer.'

The shades had deepened, from the hillside pines
The soft air breathed in balsam, overhead
The early stars glowed mildly. None could see
Within the dimness, if the elder guest
Showed any grief or no. 'Tis sure he leaned
His head upon his wrist and seemed in thought.
At last he stirred and said, ' My friend and I
Have come from far. Pray show us to our
couch.'

The voice was sad, perhaps from weariness.
Philemon brought a torch and showed his guests
A neat, bare room with pallet-beds of straw,
Saying, ' My boy's room,—so we always call it,
And keep it still for any wanderer
Whom the kind gods may send us. 'Tis our joy
To have him so in mind. Good night, sirs,
both.'

PHILEMON AND BAUCIS

Next day Philemon rose before the dawn ;
His son's door stood ajar, the guests were gone.
But after that what'er the couple did
Would prosper wondrously, till soon they grew
The richest people in the place, and still
Their greatest joy was hospitality.
And the poor milk-jug those strange men had
touched,
Howe'er so often emptied still was full.
So the pair lived on in calm content,
Till one bright autumn morn no smoke rose up
From their low chimney. Neighbours came to see,
Entered,—the doors were never fastened then—
And found them ; the old, kindly smile relaxed
Upon Philemon's lips, while Baucis' eyes
Had lost for aye their gentle, anxious look.
They had fared forth together in the night
To claim in turn from those immortal guests
The sacred rights of hospitality."

The story ended, each small listener
Shifted about, as one who from a dream
Awaking, half remembers what he dreamed ;

PHILEMON AND BAUCIS

Till one more bold jumped up and scampered
off,
The others at his heels. Then one by one,
The old men grumbling out their half content,
Bearing their weight upon their sticks, rose up
And hied them slowly to their glowing hearths ;
Till through the wagging leafage of the planes
The stars blinked down and the young harvest
 moon
Rose like a memory o'er the silent scene.



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